

**H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Good evening, Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representatives Dillon and Betts, and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Bianca Prescott. I am 16 years old and currently studying at East Granby High School. I am here to testify in support of continued funding for The Governor's Prevention Partnership, where I am a member of their Youth Council. The Youth Council was started by The Governor's Prevention Partnership in 2016. We are a group of 10 high school students who work together to provide a youth voice in prevention, advocate for peer to peer approaches, and influence our peers in making positive choices.

My fellow council members and I meet at least once a month, investigating and discussing the causes and different perspectives of drug and substance abuse. Because we are a diverse and open minded group of students, we are able to explore different aspects of why our State's youth chooses to use drugs and other substances. In my school alone, many of my peers show up to school under some kind of influence, whether it be drugs like marijuana or alcohol, and later after school follow this routine and spend their time doing drugs or drinking alcohol. We try our best to pinpoint specific ways to target these certain groups, getting a more influential message across (for instance, not resorting to fear tactics as that has not been very successful, or creating an image that portrays using substances as the "uncool" thing to do). This is what our council does, and we believe that because we are part of the State's youth community ourselves, we will better capture the attention and influence our peers.

By having a youth initiated approach in the prevention of substance abuse, we are attacking the problem from the inside out, (i.e. students influencing students). The consensus within the Youth Council is that students influencing students illuminates the feeling of condescension that students have when adults are talking about substance abuse. When students are talking with students, they are looking across the same playing field (perspective). All students need to do is listen to their peers, learning from them about how to make the right decision in not conforming to substance abuse.

I have seen firsthand in my community the effects of substance abuse and the toll that it takes on individuals, families, and society as a whole. I have seen friends lose touch with their goals, lose the drive to do well in school, and become addicted. My fellow Council members have described how they have witnessed substance abuse within their own schools as well. In some areas drinking is more of a problem, while in others it is marijuana, or other drugs. This is why we must ensure a council that will target these issues and give healthy decisions and alternatives.

My reasons for wanting to join the youth council are of both a societal and personal nature. I wanted to help my community and peers while learning and practicing leadership techniques from the people I would work and interact with in the program. I was fortunate in gaining this and much more, from being a member of the Council, and I would recommend this Council experience to anyone. The Partnership has helped me as well as my other council members by unifying a group of students with a common interest, and giving us the tools to be organized and create impacts within our communities

Thank you for your time and consideration.